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The Mirror, the Qnoma, and the Soul: Another Perspective on the Christological Formula of Babai the Great

Abstract: Various reasons have been suggested for the addition of “two *qnome*” to the traditional Antiochene christological formula (two natures in one person) of the Church of the East. These reasons can be found in wide-ranging fields that are often intertwined. Primarily, linguistic differences have caused much confusion, since *qnoma* was a term often used as a Syriac translation of the Greek term *hypostasis*, some circles almost identifying *qnoma* with “person,” and others aligning the term with “nature.” Further reasons derive from Church history, logic, epistemology and politics. Such motives will be discussed in this paper in connection with the challenges Babai encountered. After a short description of various aspects of Babai’s Christology and some contemporary sources, it will be argued that another motive has been hitherto neglected: ascetic mysticism. This new perspective focuses on the asceticism of the monks, which was aimed at finding the highest truth and required the purification of the individual soul. Sometimes, the soul was not only associated closely with the human *qnoma*, but also compared to a mirror that might reflect the light of Christ, just as Christ was considered to be the perfect representation of God. This might have resulted in an intrinsic motive of the monks to recognize an individual human *qnoma* in Christ, and might therefore have been an additional motive for their spiritual leader Babai to defend the two-*qnome* doctrine. It probably also worked the other way around: an integration and elaboration of the two-*qnome* doctrine in ascetic mysticism also was a means to gain more general acceptance of the doctrine.

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Introduction

Babai the Great (551–628) is generally thought to have played an important role in the official introduction and defence of the christological formula “two natures and two *qnome* in one person,” which was to remain the distinctive norm for the

Church of the East since its official introduction in the beginning of the seventh century. Babai had to defend this new christological formula against internal and external opponents. He was faced with a church already weakened by Miaphysites who propagated one nature (and one *qnoma*) in Christ, but its orthodoxy was also questioned by the Byzantines. These three main Christian streams which had arisen at the end of the fifth century in the Persian-Syrian world often fought each other bitterly, particularly the Dyophysites and Miaphysites in Mesopotamia. However, the differences between the diverse parties were not always sharp, and Sebastian Brock offers therefore a model that acknowledges a broader spectrum of the diverse christological doctrines.¹ Within his church, Babai's polemics were in particular directed against Henana, the director of the famous theological School of Nisibis. Babai accused him not only of teaching one *qnoma* and of allying with the Miaphysites, but also of other heresies. As this internal conflict within the Church of the East not only had to do with Christology, but was also intertwined with several issues of epistemology, dissension among monks and fluctuating alliances with worldly leaders, it is not clear to what extent these issues contributed to Babai's new formula. This paper will therefore first discuss the background leading to the challenges Babai encountered and also some of the explanations proposed. It will further point out indications for another—intrinsic—motive of ascetics that might have required the recognition of a human *qnoma* in Christ. Such indications are found in metaphors of mirrors and coins, which Babai applied to clarify his Christology and epistemology.

Babai can be considered an unofficial leader of the Church of the East during the time the Persian emperor Khosrau, to whom the Church was subject, forbade the installation of a new *catholicos* (608–628). The Church of the East officially defended the new doctrine in the presence of Khosrau at a debate in 612 with the Miaphysites and also pleaded with him to allow them a new *catholicos*. When

¹ Cf. Sebastian Brock, "The Christology of the Church of the East in the Synods of the Fifth to Early Seventh Centuries: Preliminary Considerations and Materials," in *Aksum-Thyateira: A Festschrift for Archbishop Methodios* (ed. George Dragas; London, 1985), (125–142) 131–133, repr. in idem, *Studies in Syriac Christianity* (Variorum Collected Studies Series 357; Hampshire, 1992; repr., 2001), XII; idem, "The Church of the East in the Sasanian Empire up to the Sixth Century and its Absence from the Councils in the Roman Empire," in *Syriac Dialogue 1: First Non-Official Consultation on Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition* (ed. Alfred Stirnemann and Gerhard Wilfinger; Vienna, 1994), 69–86; idem, "The Christology of the Church of the East," in *Traditions and Heritage of the Christian East* (ed. Dmitry Afinogenov and Alexey Muraviev; Moscow, 1996), (159–179) 163–164, repr. in idem, *Fire from Heaven* (Variorum Collected Studies Series 863; Aldershot, 2006), III.

Khosrau was murdered in 628, Babai was immediately offered the position, which he however refused, dying not long after.²

Babai studied medicine in Nisibis and attended its famous theological school. Later, he joined Abraham of Kashkar who recently had reformed monasticism in his new monastery of Izla (also called the Great Monastery) for which he had made rules in 570/571. Both events might have had to do with the contested appointment of Henana of Adiabene between 571 and 573 as new director of the School of Nisibis.³ The new monastery defended and fostered the Antiochene tradition of the Church of the East, which not only emphasized the human nature of Christ but also guarded his transcendent divine nature, and which was defined in the formula “two natures in one *parsopa*.” This strong adherence to the East Syrian orthodoxy followed the point of view of the clergy who in the synods of 554 and 576 had tried to bind a varied range of monastic circles more to the hierarchy of the church. The monastery became a famous model for a reformed monasticism that was characterized by a very strict solitary, ascetic, and prayerful life. The reform movement probably included celibacy as well, but this was neglected when monks could live together with wives and children. In 604, when Babai became the third abbot of the Great Monastery of Izla, he was eager to restore the strict discipline and therefore cleared the monastery of the married monks and their quarters. Especially his uncompromising actions against these monks and their families prompted many other monks to leave the monastery as well. From 608/609 Babai was also entrusted with the oversight of the northern monasteries at the request of the three metropolitans involved.⁴

Babai is said to have written about 83 treatises, but only a small number have survived. Among these are three entirely christological works: The *Liber de*

² Cf. Geevarghese Chediath, *The Christology of Mar Babai the Great* (Pontifical Oriental Institute of Religious Studies 49; Kottayam-Paderborn, 1982), 12–15.

³ Henana probably could only be officially installed as director in 573, after the death of Paul the metropolitan of Nisibis. Cf. Jean M. Fiey, *Nisibe: Métropole syriaque orientale et ses suffragants des origines à nos jours* (CSCO 388, Subsidia 54; Leuven, 1977), 54–55; Luise Abramowski, “Martyrius-Sahdona and Dissent in the Church of the East,” in *Controverses des Chrétiens dans l’Iran sassanide* (ed. Christelle Jullien; Cahiers de Studia Iranica 36; Chrétiens en terre d’Iran 2; Paris, 2008), (13–27) 19.

⁴ Chediath, *The Christology of Mar Babai* (see note 2), 1–16 offers an extended survey of the sources and its biography is followed here in general. See also: Till Engelmann, “Babai der Große,” in *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* 28 (Nordhausen, 2007), 64–67.

1 Challenges

The defence against Miaphysite propaganda seems to have become of vital importance to the Church of the East. The rivalry had been given a new momentum after Khosrau had started to conquer Byzantine provinces around 603. He now tactically favoured the Miaphysites living there and subsequently those close by. He also deported to Persia large numbers of Christians from the countries he had conquered, increasing Miaphysite influence there.¹⁰ In the year 608, Khosrau also started to paralyse the leadership of the Church of the East by denying it a new *catholicos*, exiling several bishops and allowing Miaphysites to confiscate

¹⁰ Cf. Chediath, *The Christology of Mar Babai* (see note 2), 43; Louis Duchesne, *L'Église au VI^e Siècle* (Paris, 1925), 320, 373–374.

its churches.¹¹ Additionally, Babai had to oppose not only the Miaphysite emphasis on the one nature (and one *hypostasis*), as it had been defended most vigorously by Philoxenus of Mabbug († 523) and by Severus of Antioch († 538), but also the Neo-Chalcedonian doctrine (553) of the one composite *hypostasis* (*hypostasis synthetos*), which was propagated by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian.¹² The argumentation might also have demanded a more refined use of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic concepts current at that time.

The debate had escalated at the council of Ephesus in 431, which condemned the Antiochene Christology. This and the events surrounding it left their marks on the history of the East Syrian Church. The council was highly influenced by Cyril of Alexandria, who rejected the Antiochene emphasis on the two natures in Christ, defending rather the doctrine that after the union Christ had one nature and one *hypostasis*. He accused his Antiochene rival Nestorius of teaching two *hypostaseis* or even two Sons. In reaction to Cyril's accusations, Nestorius developed a Christology of two *hypostaseis* in his apologetic *Liber Heraclidis* written at the end of his life, but this remained unknown for a long time in Persia. The one-*hypostasis* Christology was to remain dominant in Byzantine Christology. In 451, the Byzantine Council of Chalcedon defined a christological formula according to which Christ has two natures concurring in one *prosopon* and one *hypostasis* (this is rendered in Syriac as “concurring in one *parsopa* and one *qnoma*” [ܡܠܬܐ ܥܕܝ ܦܪܫܘܦܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܩܢܡܐ]),¹³ while both natures keep their property. The union was characterized by four qualities: without confusion, without change, without division and without separation.¹⁴ As to most Syriac speaking theologians *hypostasis* (*qnoma*) implied nature, the expression “one *hypostasis*” was illogical to Syriac speaking Miaphysites, because the Chalcedonian formula also acknowl-

¹¹ Cf. Gerrit J. Reinink, “Babai the Great’s ‘Life of George’ and the Propagation of Doctrine in the Late Sasanian Empire,” in *Portraits of Spiritual Authority: Religious Power in Early Christianity, Byzantium & the Christian Orient* (ed. Jan W. Drijvers and John W. Watt; Leiden, 1999), repr. in idem, *Syriac Christianity under Late Sasanian and Early Islamic Rule* (Variorum Collected Studies Series 831; Aldershot, 2005), (171–193) 180–181; Michael G. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (2d ed.; New York, 2005), 350–351.

¹² Babai referred to the composite *hypostasis* as ܩܢܡܐ ܡܪܟܒܐ (*qnoma mrakba*). Cf. Babai, *Liber de unione* 3,9 (101,3 V.; trans. 70–71 V.).

¹³ Timotheus Aelurus, *Contra eos qui dicunt duas naturas* (PO 13, 230,7–8 Nau). This text contains the West Syrian Version in British Museum Add. 12,156, f. 41r-v (PO 13, 228,9–230,11 Nau).

¹⁴ ἀσύγχυτως, ἀτρέπτως, ἀδιαρίτως, ἀχωρίστως (Concilium Chalcedonense, *Symbolum* [ACO 2,1,2, 129,23–130,3 Schwartz]). See also Theresia Hainthaler, “A Short Analysis of the Definition of Chalcedon and Some Reflections,” *The Harp* 20 (2006): (317–331) 328–331.

edged two natures, and they therefore rejected Chalcedon to such an extent that they were even called Anti-Chalcedonians.¹⁵

Within the Church of the East, discussions arose on how to integrate the concept of *qnoma* into the Antiochene formula. Supporters of the strict Antiochene Dyophysitism, who sometimes were pejoratively called Nestorians, could not but interpret one *qnoma* as one nature, which they could not accept. The Chalcedonian formula formed, however, the base for the Christology of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian (527–565). He convoked in 553 a council in Constantinople, which made decisions to please the Miaphysites, but had a great impact on the Church of the East: It ratified the formula of the one *hypostasis synthetos*, and condemned (again) the Antiochene Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia, his defenders and any Nestorianism. Because of its rejection of the *hypostasis synthetos*, the Church of the East was accused of teaching two *hypostaseis*, which was considered to imply teaching the doctrine of two persons or of two Sons. The rejection of the title *Theotokos* for Mary was also condemned and seen as a mark of Nestorianism.¹⁶ As several christological terms were used in diverse and even opposite ways, which formed part of the problems, it was moreover declared that *hypostasis* (Syriac *qnoma*) was the same as *person* (Syriac *parsopa*) and not as *physis* (“nature”), whereas *physis* was the same as *ousia*. But no definitions were given. The decision that “nature” and *hypostasis* were not considered homonyms any more was directed against the Cyrillian Miaphysites. The Church of the East, however, did not accept the decisions and kept its own terminology, while the Miaphysites associated *ousia* not with “nature” but rather with *parsopa*. Thus the misunderstandings caused by the different terminologies continued.

The etymology of the term *qnoma* is not clear, but it may derive from the Syriac verb *qum*.¹⁷ The fourth century theologian Ephrem, who remained famous

¹⁵ See for the discussions on terminology: Brock, “The Christology of the Church of the East in the Synods” (see note 1), 130–132. See also below, section 1.2.

¹⁶ Cf. Alois Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche* 2,2: *Die Kirche von Konstantinopel im 6. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg, 2004), 464–470.

¹⁷ Cf. Louis R. M. Sako, “Étude du contenu,” in idem, *Lettre christologique du Patriarche syro-oriental Iṣhō’yahb II de Gdālā* (Rome, 1983), (101–136) 102–103. *Qum* (ܩܡ) has a wide range of meanings. The most important are: “to rise, stand” and “to be established” or “fixed.” Further can be mentioned: “to persevere, to come into a state, to exist, come into being, to stand firm.” The seventh century *catholicos* Iṣhō’yahb III knew that Greeks called *qnoma* a *hypostasis* (ϣϥϥϥϥϥ) and he described it as ܩܡܐܐ ܩܡܐܐܐ ܩܡܐܐ —“stability, subsistence and substance” (Iṣhō’yahb III, *Liber Epistularum* M-7 [CSCO 11, 135 Duval]). All these terms derive from ܩܡ; cf. Robert Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* 2 (Oxford, 1901), 3522–3538; Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon* (A Translation from the Latin, Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann’s *Lexikon Syriacum*; Winona Lake, Ind., 2009), 1330–1333.

among both Syrian denominations, already used the term in various ways, which resembled those for *hypostasis*.¹⁸ As the Syriac term *qnoma* had several meanings that could vary within different settings, it caused many misunderstandings. The confusion was not confined to that period: when *qnoma* is given different translations in secondary literature, the difficulties are only compounded. This study chooses therefore not to translate *qnoma* but to use only the Syriac term.

Luise Abramowski and Gerrit J. Reinink hold that the new East Syrian doctrine of two *qnome* was mainly a reaction to the Neo-Chalcedonian one *hypostasis synthetos*.¹⁹ An important contributing circumstance was the fact that since 540 the Church of the East could use the Syriac translation of the recently rediscovered *Liber Heraclidis* of Nestorius, in which the formula of two natures, two *qnome* and one *parsopa*, was expressed. Abramowski excludes the possibility that other sources had caused the change in the traditional Antiochene formula, which was still used in the acts of the synods prior to 612. The use of *qnoma* in their christological formula might have led to conflicting positions within the School of Nisibis.²⁰

1.2 Polemics within the Church of the East and the School of Nisibis

The christological discussions within the School of Nisibis on the use of *qnoma* are supposed to have led to two rival streams, with one defending one *qnoma*

¹⁸ Ute Possekel shows four groups of meanings for the term *qnoma*. Firstly, it can indicate a material or corporeal substance. Secondly, it can mean the real existence or actual reality of something. Thirdly, it may refer to the essence or inner nature and fourthly, the person or self. Cf. Ute Possekel, *Evidence of Greek Philosophical Concepts in the Writing of Ephrem the Syrian* (CSCO 580; Leuven, 1999), 65–78.

¹⁹ Cf. Luise Abramowski, “Die Christologie Babais des Großen,” in *Symposium Syriacum, 1972: célébré dans les jours 26–31 octobre 1972 à l’Institut Pontifical Oriental de Rome* (ed. Ignatius Ortiz de Urbina; Orientalia Christiana Analecta 197; Rome, 1974), (219–244) 221–222; Gerrit J. Reinink, “Tradition and the Formation of the ‘Nestorian’ Identity in Sixth- to Seventh-Century Iraq,” in *Religious Origins of Nations? The Christian Communities of the Middle East* (ed. Bas ter Haar Romeny; Church History and Religious Culture 89,1; Leiden, 2009), (217–250) 222, 230.

²⁰ Nestorius, *Liber Heraclidis* 2,1 (ed. Paul Bedjan, *Nestorius: Le Livre d’Héraclide de Damas* [Paris, 1910], 291; 304–305). Cf. Abramowski, “Martyrius-Sahdona” (see note 3), 18–19; Luise Abramowski, “Die nachephesinische Christologie der edessenischen Theodorianer,” in *Edessa in hellenistisch-römischer Zeit: Religion, Kultur und Politik zwischen Ost und West: Beiträge des internationalen Edessa-Symposiums in Halle an der Saale, 14.–17. Juli 2005* (ed. Lutz Greisiger, Claudia Rammelt, and Jürgen Tubach; Beirut Texte und Studien 116; Würzburg, 2009), (1–10) 1–2; Abramowski, “Die Christologie Babais des Großen” (see note 19), 221–222.

The conflict between the two streams culminated in the departure of a significant group of teachers and students during the catholicate of Sabrisho' (596–604). It might have been the group defending the two *qnome* formula in rejection of the solutions of the other party that opted for the “one *parsopa* = one *qnomā*”-formula.

31 An ambiguous fragment from Theodore of Mopsuestia's *On Incarnation* (ed. Eduard Sachau, *Theodori Mopsuesti fragmenta syriaca* [Leipzig, 1896], 69,16–71,10) might have played an important role in the debates as well as a gloss to the one *parsopa* of Christ, “according to nature and to *qnoma*” (ܩܢܡܐ ܕܬܝܪܝܐ), in the introduction to Nestorius, *Liber Heraclidis* (125,13–14 B.), which was considered completely authentic. See Reinink, “Tradition and the Formation” (see note 19), 222, 228–230; Luise Abramowski, “Babai der Große: Christologische Probleme und ihre Lösungen,” *Orientalia Christiana periodica* 41 (1975): (289–343) 297–300; eadem, “Martyrius-Sahdona” (see note 3), 20–27.

This might have taken place not long after 596,³² or around 600.³³ Reinink argues that the Miaphysites tactically tried to weaken the Church of the East by stirring these internal conflicts.³⁴

What Henana actually did teach is not clear, since most information on Henana's teaching consists of many biased accusations by Babai. These involved a variety of heresies connected with the impious Cyril, Arius, Eunomius, Justinian, the Theopaschite Severians, magic and astrology, and especially Origenism.³⁵ In Babai's later *Life of George*, Babai still stated that Henana not only made God limited, susceptible to suffering, mortal, divided and separated, but also denied the resurrection of the body, admitting salvation to the soul only and—like Origen—taught that everyone could participate in the nature of God.³⁶ Probably, discussions on human free will were involved as well and Henana was accused of denying this.³⁷

To obtain more information on the School of Nisibis and Henana than the polemics of Babai provide, we can use two contemporary sources, written by one or two persons called Barhadbeshabba, a teacher or teachers of the School of Nisibis who had left it in protest against Henana. One source is the *Ecclesiastical History*,³⁸ which was written by Barhadbeshabba 'Arbaya. Unfortunately, it is not sure when he wrote it and thus whether or not it was written under the auspices of Henana. The fact that he considered the confession of a single divine nature

³² For instance cf. Reinink, "Tradition and the Formation" (see note 19), 244.

³³ For instance cf. Alberto Camplani, "The Revival of Persian Monasticism (Sixth to Seventh Centuries): Church Structures, Theological Academy, and Reformed Monks," in *Foundations of Power and Conflicts of Authority in Late-Antique Monasticism: Proceedings of the International Seminar Turin, December 2–4, 2004* (ed. Alberto Camplani and Giovanni Filoramo; Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 157; Leuven, 2007), (277–295) 286; Chediath, *The Christology of Mar Babai* (see note 2), 52; Florence Jullien, *Le monachisme en Perse: La réforme d'Abraham le Grand, père des moines de l'Orient* (CSCO 622; Leuven, 2008), 186. Jullien also describes the Great Monastery as "bastion du nestorianisme" (ibid., 14).

³⁴ Cf. Reinink, "Tradition and the Formation" (see note 19), 230–231, 245–248.

³⁵ Cf. Antoine Guillaumont, *Les 'Képhalaia Gnostica' d'Évagre le Pontique et l'histoire de l'Origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens* (Patristica Sorbonensia 5; Paris, 1962), 189–196, with references.

³⁶ Cf. Guillaumont, *Les 'Képhalaia Gnostica'* (see note 35), 194–195; Babai, *Sanctus Georgius* (ed. Paul Bedjan, *Histoire de Mar-Jabalaha: De trois autres patriarches, d'un prêtre et de deux laïques, nestoriens* [Leipzig, 1895], 477).

³⁷ Cf. Karl Pinggéra, "Das Bild Narsais des Großen bei Barḥadḥšabbā 'Arḥāyā: Zum theologischen Profil der 'Geschichte der heiligen Väter,'" in *Inkulturation des Christentums im Sasanidenreich* (ed. Arafa Mustafa, Jürgen Tubach, and G. Sophia Vashalomidze; Wiesbaden, 2007), (245–259) 254–256, with references.

³⁸ Barhadbeshabba, *Historia ecclesiastica* (PO 9, 489–677 Nau; PO 23, 176–343 Nau).

and a single *qnoma* a heresy might indicate that he had written it after he had left the school.³⁹ The Cyrillians and Severians are said to acknowledge one nature and one *qnoma* after the union and thus to introduce mixture and confusion.⁴⁰ The author of the other source was also called Barhadbeshabba and he most likely wrote it when he was still at the School of Henana, as the latter is praised highly. It was called *The Cause of the Foundation of Schools*⁴¹ and was addressed to the new students and presumably read each year. Although it does not contain clear christological statements, it sheds some light on the epistemology of the School of Nisibis. The *Cause* contains several Aristotelian and Neoplatonic concepts and it is moreover influenced by the Origenist literature of Evagrius, which had a deep impact on East Syrian monasticism and seems to have played a role in conflicts about the right epistemology.⁴² The *Cause* divided learning into intelligence (ܐܬܝܠܡܐܕܐ) and action (ܐܬܝܠܡܐܕܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ). The perfection (ܐܬܝܠܡܐܕܐ) of intelligence was the exact comprehension (ܐܬܝܠܡܐܕܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ) of the knowledge of all beings, while the perfection of action was the excellence of virtues (ܐܬܝܠܡܐܕܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ).⁴³ As we will see in Section 1.4, Babai made a similar division. Such divisions stood in the Aristotelian tradition, as was the connected basic assumption that the rational mind was necessary for discriminating between good and bad,⁴⁴ which was also familiar to Theodore.

The content of the *Cause* can be summarized as follows:⁴⁵ After an introduction of God's epistemological inaccessibility,⁴⁶ the text dwells on the divine illumination and the human soul with its cognitive faculties. Both intelligence and actions have to be perfected. God created for humans the visible world to enable the

39 Cf. Barhadbeshabba, *Historia ecclesiastica* 2,7 (PO 23, 193,5–6 N.).

40 Cf. Barhadbeshabba, *Historia ecclesiastica* 2,14 (PO 23, 197,4–10 N.).

41 Barhadbeshabba, *Causa scholas condendi* (PO 4, 314–404 Scher); Cf. Becker, “Barhadbeshabba, *The Cause of the Foundation of the Schools*: Introduction,” in idem, *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis* (see note 21), (86–93) 86–87. There are similarities between the *Cause* and this *Ecclesiastical History*, which seems to be older, but there are also some differences. Probably they were written by the same Barhadbeshabba and they might have used a common but unknown source. See for further discussion, Becker, “Introduction,” in idem, *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis* (see note 21), (1–19) 11–16; Reinink, “Tradition and the Formation” (see note 19), 232–233.

42 Cf. Becker, “Barhadbeshabba, *The Cause*: Introduction” (see note 41), 91–93.

43 Barhadbeshabba, *Causa scholas condendi* (342,12–343,2 S.).

44 Cf. Babai, *Expositio libri Centuarium* 1,59 (100 F.); Barhadbeshabba, *Causa scholas condendi* (343,8–344,7 S.; trans. Adam Becker, “Barhadbeshabba, *The Cause of the Foundation of the Schools*,” in idem, *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis* [see note 21], [94–160] 111–112).

45 Cf. Becker, “Barhadbeshabba, *The Cause*: Introduction” (see note 41), 86–91.

46 Barhadbeshabba, *Causa scholas condendi* (327,1–339,14 S.).

The *Cause* does not seem to give evidence that substantiates Babai's accusations, but might have given rise to his suspicions concerning Origenism. The *Cause* claims that in order to prevent human beings from envying the honour of the angels, the former were called Gods and even received the ability to traverse the firmament and authority over creation, including the course of the luminaries.⁵² Babai, however, granted only the best part of the human soul, the free reasoning (ܪܥܢܐ) with its free will, the freedom to leave the body and to choose to either go to heaven or to remain in a low state.⁵³ He further rejected the idea that the rational part of the soul (*logistikon*, ܠܘܓܝܬܝܟܐܢ) is part of divinity, by stating: "This knowledge can connect itself to the wisdom of God, but not to his nature, as Origen and Henana state; it is however a gift of the Spirit."⁵⁴ Babai associated such Origenism strongly with the teaching of a composite *qnoma* and

[illegible]

qnoma and *parsopa* was similar to the proposed terminology of Justinian,⁶² it is not impossible that Henana sought common grounds with neo-Chalcedonians and even with Miaphysites, at least for the sake of clarity in debates.

Besides the christological arguments, other factors might also have contributed to Babai's polemics against Henana. Michael Morony, for instance, ascribes a pivotal role to Henana in searching for a theological and exegetical compromise with the Miaphysites, while he was supported by aristocrats striving for more power within the church.⁶³ But Reinink rejects both the theory that ascribes Miaphysitism to Henana and the theory that Henana's exegesis was deviant from that of the Church of the East.⁶⁴ The hypothesis of an alliance between Henana and aristocrats with Miaphysite sympathies against the clergy will be discussed in the next section.

Concerning the debate on the question of to what extent the School should hold on to the Theodorian tradition, Reinink assumes that a liberal and open tendency opposed a strict-Theodorian tendency which elevated Theodore to "the determining factor in the formation of their theological identity and that of their church."⁶⁵ The followers of Henana would represent the liberal tendency, as they still allowed to use other fathers beside Theodore, such as Diodore, Basil, Chrysostom and Evagrius. Reinink explains the strict-Theodorian position as a reaction to the many christological disputes in the School of Nisibis which seemed to threaten this bulwark of East Syrian Orthodoxy. The strict Theodorians would therefore have started to emphasize Theodore's position more and in 605 they even granted him the exclusive authority in exegetical instruction.⁶⁶

1.3 Geo-politics and lay elites

Jean-Maurice Fiey describes how various groups or individuals in and around Nisibis had a pro-Byzantine attitude. This became critical again during the time

⁶² Cf. Grillmeier, *Jesus der Christus* 2,2 (see note 18), 484.

⁶³ Cf. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (see note 11), 349, 356–357, 381.

⁶⁴ Cf. Reinink, "Tradition and the Formation" (see note 19), 225–227, 235–238.

⁶⁵ Reinink, " 'Edessa Grew Dim and Nisibis Shone Forth': The School of Nisibis at the Transition of the Sixth-Seventh Century," in *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East* (ed. Jan W. Drijvers and Alasdair A. MacDonald; Leiden, 1996), repr. in idem, *Syriac Christianity under Late Sasanian and Early Islamic Rule* (see note 11), (77–90) 88.

⁶⁶ Cf. Reinink, "Tradition and the Formation" (see note 19), 242–244; idem, " 'Edessa Grew Dim and Nisibis Shone Forth' (see note 65), 84–89. See also section 1.4.

that the Byzantine emperor Justin II started to attack Persia in 565 and even tried to recapture Nisibis in 572. Khosrau, of course, preferred here higher clergy he trusted. But this did not always work. The varying loyalties can be seen in the examples of Paul the Metropolitan of Nisibis and of Isho'yahb I, then the bishop of Arzun and formerly head of the School of Nisibis. Paul provided Justin II with strategic information, but was deposed in 573 when the Persians took the nearby Byzantine garrison of Dara and he died shortly thereafter, while Isho'yahb I supplied intelligence to the Persian king and became *catholicos* in 581/582. Although Nisibis remained in Persian hands, its position continued to be contested during the next decades.⁶⁷ According to Martin Tamcke, Henana headed a heterogeneous but powerful movement, which favoured Byzantium.⁶⁸

Morony holds that the conflict with Miaphysite movements escalated after the fall of Edessa in 610, when the Persian king started to experiment with a pro-Miaphysite policy to attract people of the newly conquered provinces, and churches in and around Seleucia-Ctesiphon were handed over to Miaphysites. Opposition came from monks of the Great Monastery under the leadership of Babai and Yazdin.⁶⁹ Yazdin was called the “head of the believers”⁷⁰ and was a powerful tax collector at Khosrau's court and very influential within the Church of the East. He owned many estates and, like other landed Christian Persian aristocrats, built churches and monasteries.⁷¹ Yazdin's influential family seems to have had pro-Byzantine sympathies.⁷²

Morony further draws attention to the already existing system of patronage over churches and monasteries by local aristocrats, who strove for more influence within the church. He suggests that the rivalry was mainly between these aristocrats allying with Henana versus clergymen and a monastic party headed by Babai defending their ecclesiastical autonomy, and that Babai's party had therefore developed a distinctive christological doctrine.⁷³ Although considering the role of the lay patrons is a valuable addition in trying to understand the conflicts, the proposed dichotomy between monks and clergymen versus a lay school party does not seem to stand, and consequently would not have been a

⁶⁷ Cf. Fiey, *Nisibe* (see note 3), 53–57.

⁶⁸ Cf. Tamcke, *Der Katholikos-Patriarch Sabrišō' I* (see note 26), 31.

⁶⁹ Cf. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (see note 11), 350.

⁷⁰ Thomas of Marga, *Liber Superiorum* 1,23 (ed. Ernest A. Wallis Budge, *The book of Governors: The Historia Monastica of Thomas Bishop of Marga A.D. 840* 1 [London, 1893; repr. Piscataway, 2003], 47,11): ܬܝܕܝܢ ܫܝܚܝܬܐ.

⁷¹ Cf. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (see note 11), 171, 348.

⁷² Walter E. Kaegi, *Heraclius: Emperor of Byzantium* (Cambridge, 2007), 170–175.

⁷³ Cf. Morony, *Iraq after the Muslim Conquest* (see note 11), 347, 350–354.

factor in the development of the new Christology. Babai fought other monastic circles and there were tensions between clergy and monks as well. The situation was far more complex and there were many exceptions, such as Yazdin and other influential lay Christians who sided with the clerical party and aristocratic converts who had become monks. It does not seem unthinkable however that some local aristocrats allied with the Church of the East in an attempt to protect their churches and monasteries from being taken away and handed over to Miaphysites, while other aristocrats might even have encouraged this transfer as long as these properties remained under their patronage. This suggestion is in line with Joel Walker's observation that by the end of the Sasanian period, "the monasteries of northern Iraq had become critical institutions for the transmission of Christian family wealth."⁷⁴

1.4 Monastic circles

There was a large and heterogeneous group of monks—rejecting the clergy and following their own ways—that might have been influenced by various combinations of Miaphysitism, Origenism, Messalian tendencies and Henanian circles. The challenge caused by these diffuse groups might have elicited Babai's attacks on their basic tenets. These monks should not be confused with the monks who belonged to the reform monastery affiliated with the Great Monastery of Izla, of which Babai was the abbot.

The dissenting monks were often referred to as "Messalians" (ܡܫܝܐܢܝܐ). Babai stated in his *Commentary on the Centuries of Evagrius Ponticus* that the falsely named Messalians claimed that humans can know God as he does himself and that they can see him.⁷⁵ He described them as "diviners" (ܕܝܝܢܝܐ ܡܝܢ ܡܫܝܐܢܝܐ)⁷⁶ and named them in one breath with Henana and Justinian. Though the term Messalians was often indiscriminately used to discredit opponents, Messalian tendencies might nevertheless have played a role, if one defines Messalian with Adam Becker as an "ascetic movement which challenged the social order and advocated an immediate access to the divine."⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Joel T. Walker, *The Legend of Mar Qardagh: Narrative and Christian Heroism in Late Antique Iraq* (The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 40; Berkeley, 2006), 242.

⁷⁵ Cf. Babai, *Expositio libri Centuarium* 2,11 (136 F.).

⁷⁶ Babai, *Liber de unione* 3,9 (82,26–28 V.).

⁷⁷ Becker, *Fear of God* (see note 50), 194–195. See also section 1.5.

It is remarkable that Babai elevated Evagrius (345–399) and the monk John of Apamea (first half of the fifth century) to the same position as that of Theodore. Babai considered them the two pillars of orthodoxy that corresponded with two ways for believers: “spiritual knowledge” (ܐܘܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ) and “training of virtue (or asceticism)” (ܕܥܡܠܐ ܕܥܡܠܐ).⁷⁸ He commended Theodore for beginners as providing basic knowledge of outward faith, and Evagrius and John for the more advanced internal development of virtues.⁷⁹ The works of John of Apamea, a pre-Chalcedonian mystic, were used by Syriac monastic circles of both Monophysite and Dyophysite denominations. John discerned three orders of spiritual development: the ways of the body, the soul and the spirit. The “final perfection” is only fully attained after the resurrection.⁸⁰

The originally Neoplatonic and Origenist work of Evagrius Ponticus, which was also condemned by the 553 Council, played another important role in monastic mysticism. Evagrius held that, originally, intelligent souls were in intellectual unity with the divine, but had fallen away from this unity into a bodily state in which they had to find their way back to this former unity through asceticism and contemplation, or *theoria*.⁸¹ His book *Kephalaia Gnostica* was available in two Syriac versions. One was a quite accurate translation that probably went back to Sergius of Resh‘ayna († 536) and that still contained Origenist elements. Babai was aware of this version, but rejected it as forgery. He used the other version which was almost devoid of Origenist elements.⁸² The editorial note of the copyist of

⁷⁸ Babai, *Expositio libri Centuarium*, introduction (16 F.).

⁷⁹ Cf. Babai, *Expositio libri Centuarium*, introduction (16; 18 F.); Guillaumont, “Justinien et l’Église de Perse” (see note 23), 59; Guillaumont, *Les ‘Képhalaia Gnostica’* (see note 35), 269, 289–290.

⁸⁰ On the identity of John of Apamea, a Syriac writer who probably flourished 430–450 and seems to have been influenced by Ephrem, see for instance: André de Halleux, “La christologie de Jean le solitaire,” *Le Muséon* 94 (1981): (5–36) 35–36; Leo van Leijsen, “De driedeling van het geestelijk leven bij Johannes van Apamea: Kritische kanttekeningen bij enige gangbare interpretaties,” *Het Christelijk Oosten* 51 (1999): (213–250) 213–230; Robert A. Kitchen, “Yohannan Ihidaya: John the Solitary of Apamea (first half of 5th cent.),” in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage* (see note 9), 442; Although Werner Strothmann considered John of Apamea’s Christology of Monophysite character, André de Halleux cannot find sufficient indications in John’s vocabulary and thinking to support this thesis. Werner Strothmann, *Johannes von Apamea* (PTS 11; Berlin, 1972), 73, 80.

⁸¹ Cf. Becker, *Fear of God* (see note 50), 176–177.

⁸² According to Guillaumont, it may have been made at the order of Philoxenus of Mabbug. However, John Watt suggests that it was already translated in Edessa at the time Antiochene theology dominated the Persian school and before Philoxenus attended this school. Philoxenus may not have been aware of some Antiochene elements. Guillaumont, *Les ‘Képhalaia Gnostica’* (see note 35), 227, 261, 272; John W. Watt, “Philoxenus and the Old Syriac Version of Evagrius’ Centuries,” *Oriens Christianus* 64 (1980): (65–81) 76, 80–81.

Babai's *Commentary on the Centuries of Evagrius Ponticus* even stated that it was written to defend Evagrius against false claims associating him with the heretical Origen.⁸³ According to Babai, Origenism not only taught human participation in the Divine nature, but also the pre-existence of the soul and the denial of the Resurrection, and it would therefore impair the foundation of faith.⁸⁴

The reasons for which Babai accused Henana of Origenism seem to be diffuse and it is not even sure whether or not Henana really was an Origenist. Tamcke holds that Henana was an Origenist who used the works of Evagrius for his argumentation and that Babai consequently had to defend the Nestorian theology against Henana while giving an anti-Origenist commentary.⁸⁵ But probably Babai's identification of the teaching of one composite *qnoma* with Origenism was one reason for his accusation; a second would be the wish to incriminate Henana; a third might be Origenism being associated with an epistemology rejected by Babai.

1.5 Rival epistemologies?

Becker connects the problems around Henana with an intellectually and socially destabilising “influx of new ideas into the Church of the East—West-Syrian theology, alternative forms of exegesis and an Evagrian emphasis on divine accessibility, which was labelled Origenism.”⁸⁶ He seeks the cause for the rivalry between the school and the monastery not so much in a different Christology, but rather in a different epistemology which might have enabled Henana to challenge the hierarchy within the Church.⁸⁷ Becker suggests that Henana's acceptance of Evagrius' Origenism might have strengthened Henana's claim to offer the best way to spiritual knowledge in the school. Where monasteries might facilitate temporary access to the divine, thanks to prolonged spiritual purification and divine grace,⁸⁸ the schools allowed claims to be made about the divine while relying on the Neoplatonic commentary tradition of the Aristotelian *Organon*. This can be seen in the *Cause* that “used Aristotle to interpret the created world in order to learn

⁸³ Cf. Babai, *Expositio libri Centuarium*, introduction (8 F.).

⁸⁴ Cf. Babai, *Liber de unione* 5,19 (183,8–9; 185,14–22 [cf. 1 Cor. 15:13–18]; 187,13–19 V.).

⁸⁵ Cf. Tamcke, *Der Katholikos-Patriarch Sabrišō' I* (see note 26), 33.

⁸⁶ Becker, *Fear of God* (see note 50), 202.

⁸⁷ Cf. Becker, *Fear of God* (see note 50), 202–203.

⁸⁸ Cf. Becker, *Fear of God* (see note 50), 177.

something about its essentially unknowable Creator.”⁸⁹ Although the concept of Divine Pedagogy already permeated Antiochene Christology, this now had culminated in a formalized education system according to which indirect knowledge of the Divine could be accessed through a rational and philosophic process.⁹⁰ Becker speculates that if Henana accepted in his school a radical Evagrianism permitting direct knowledge of God, this might have challenged the position of Babai and his monastery which was close to Nisibis.⁹¹

It was perhaps in this context that Babai defended a hierarchy in which the school offered only preparatory learning, while the monastery was the place where prolonged asceticism might ultimately grant access to higher knowledge. spiritual knowledge and asceticism were instrumental to having a vision of the Trinity. Humans had to practice asceticism while following the commandments, and might then reach a temporary “spiritual contemplation” (ܐܘܝܢ ܠܝܕܠܗܐ)⁹² of the Trinity. The monastic-ascetic life was therefore an ongoing effort to gradually gain more knowledge of the transcendental God, whereby the last step was only possible in prayer and dependent on God’s mercy to reveal himself.⁹³ Babai’s commentary on *The Spiritual Law* expounded how Christ—as the summit of Grace—would live in the human soul of the believer and would make it his temple.⁹⁴

Babai’s *Commentary on the Centuries of Evagrius Ponticus* allowed the ascetic monks a mystical revelation of God without this impairing the transcendence and impassibility of God. Babai achieved this by omitting the remaining Origenist parts from the already adjusted Syriac translation, giving corrective interpretations and focussing on a phased knowledge of God, which the monks could attain. One started with the contemplation of the visible creation (natural contemplation). When the underlying principles or *logoi* of the visible creation were understood,

⁸⁹ Becker, “Barḥadbeshabba, *The Cause*: Introduction,” (see note 41), 92; cf. idem, *Fear of God* (see note 50), 150.

⁹⁰ Cf. Becker, *Fear of God* (see note 50), 194–195.

⁹¹ Cf. Becker, *Fear of God* (see note 50), 202–203.

⁹² Babai, *Expositio libri Centuarium* 1,13 (56; 58 F.).

⁹³ Cf. Becker, *Fear of God* (see note 50), 176–177; Till Engelmann, “Der Kephalaia-Kommentar Babais des Großen als Beispiel monastisch-mystischer Theologie,” in *Mystik – Metapher – Bild: Beiträge des VII. Makarios-Symposiums, Göttingen 2007* (ed. Martin Tamcke; Göttingen, 2008), (43–53) 47–53.

⁹⁴ Cf. Paul Krüger, “Zum theologischen Menschenbild Babais den Großen nach seinem noch unveröffentlichten Kommentar zu den beiden Sermones des Mönches Markus über das geistige Gesetz,” *Oriens Christianus* 44 (1960): (46–74) 52–53.

times) knowledge of the divine could be obtained.¹⁰¹ However, the conflict mainly seems to have been with the Great Monastery and its school that might even have been founded in reaction to the teachings of Henana. If one recognizes Jérôme Labourt's conviction that without the opposition by the first three abbots of the Great Monastery the teachings of Henana would have prevailed,¹⁰² one might rather suggest that the Great Monastery challenged the position of the School of Nisibis by incriminating Henana and offering formative theological knowledge itself.¹⁰³ Moreover, if the suggested difference in epistemologies (with Origenist elements opposing the basic Antiochene dogma) was indeed the critical factor, this might precisely have elicited christological discussions.

Several other scholars also point to the rivalry between the School of Nisibis and the Great Monastery. Arthur Vööbus, in his tentative reconstruction of the sparse and somewhat contradictory sources, finds indications that the School of Nisibis could have been challenged by a rival school with connections to the Great Monastery, but Fiey and Becker take here a more careful position.¹⁰⁴ Alberto Camplani attributes victory to the Great Monastery in the complex situation of conflicting powers. He suggests that it increased its influence when Babai became the supervisor of the Persian monasteries thanks to its loyalty to the conservative party of the East Syrian Church, as was for instance demonstrated by its receipt of the group that had left the School of Nisibis.¹⁰⁵

Babai might indeed have opposed Henana and his school because of different claims on how to gain knowledge of the transcendent God. One further could suggest that the emphasis on the purification of the individual human soul of each monk—who had Christ as his prime example—might have required the acknowledgment of an individual human soul in Christ as well. As will be shown below, this might have resulted in the idea that Christ must have had his own human *qnoma* too. Such an intrinsic motivation caused by ascetic spirituality might therefore have contributed to the development of the two-*qnome* doctrine. This hypothesis is deduced from Babai's *Commentary on the Centuries of Evagrius*

101 Cf. Becker, *Fear of God* (see note 50), 202–203.

102 Cf. Jérôme Labourt, *Le Christianisme dans l'empire Perse sous la dynastie Sassanide (224–632)* (Paris, 1904), 215.

103 Sabino Chialà, however, rejects hypotheses that the Great Monastery incorporated a school. Sabino Chialà, “Les mystiques syro-orientaux: une école ou une époque?,” in *Les mystiques syriaques* (ed. Alain Desreumaux; Études Syriaques 8; Paris, 2011), 72–73.

104 Cf. Arthur Vööbus, *History of the school of Nisibis* (CSCO 266; Leuven, 1965), 265–268, with references; Fiey, *Nisibe* (see note 3), 48–49; Becker, *Fear of God* (see note 50), 159–160.

105 Cf. Camplani, “The Revival of Persian Monasticism” (see note 33), 286–289.

2 The concept of *qnoma* in Babai's work.

Later, Babai used *qnoma* predominantly in a christological context and he repeatedly argued why two *qnome* were needed for the union of both natures to one *parsopa* and why the one-*qnoma* doctrine had to be rejected. This is extensively done in his *Liber de Unione*, which systematically discusses the union

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(ܠܚܝܬܐ) of the two *kyane* and two *qnome* in one *parsopa* of Christ.¹¹¹ While developing this Christology, Babai used the *Liber Heraclidis* of Nestorius. He elaborated the concept of two *qnome* in Christ in order to keep the properties of the two natures intact and to explain that the exchange of properties was not possible at the level of the *qnome*, but only of the *parsope*.¹¹² Babai rejected the qnomatic union mainly because it impaired the transcendence of God: it would lead to the detested Theopaschism and to the belief that the divine nature can be diminished. Furthermore, it would reduce Christ to an illusion and appearance, which would impair the very basis of faith.¹¹³ It would also introduce mixture and confusion of the two natures in Christ and even the—rejected—teaching that humans have the same nature as God. Babai argued that if the human *qnoma* of Christ could become one with the divine *qnoma*, this would apply to all human *qnome*. As we have seen, Babai concluded that admitting a qnomatic union in Christ was the same as falling to the heresy of Origen.¹¹⁴

Babai acknowledged the “qnomatic composition” (ܡܚܒܪܐ ܩܢܡܐ) of humans.¹¹⁵ In contrast to angels and animals, humans have a qnomatic and natural unity, consisting of a soul and a body, of which the natures and *qnome* are “necessarily” (ܡܚܒܪܐ) and “forcefully” (ܕܥܝܢܐ) united into one *qnoma*. Separately, the *qnome* of the human soul and body are “not firm” (ܡܚܒܪܐ) or “fixed” (ܡܚܒܪܐ),¹¹⁷ as they cannot completely exist and function without each other. But together, they “subsist in itself” (ܡܚܒܪܐ ܡܚܒܪܐ)¹¹⁸ as one *qnoma* and cannot unite with other *qnome*. Therefore, Christ’s human *qnoma* could not unite with the divine *qnoma*. Babai thus refused to compare the union between soul and body to the one in Christ, because he considered it to be forced and involuntary and he rather emphasized the christological union that is personal, voluntary, not compelled and not susceptible to suffering.¹¹⁹ An additional reason to reject a

111 Cf. Abramowski, “Die Christologie Babais des Großen” (see note 19), 227–228, 235; eadem, “Christologische Probleme” (see note 31), 328.

112 Cf. Abramowski, “Christologische Probleme” (see note 31), 302–306.

113 Cf. Guillaumont, *Les ‘Képhalaia Gnostica’* (see note 35), 89–93, with references.

114 Cf. Babai, *Tractatus Vaticanus* (295,12–15 V.); Guillaumont, *Les ‘Képhalaia Gnostica’* (see note 35), 189–193.

115 Babai, *Tractatus Vaticanus* (295,31 V.).

116 Babai, *Liber de unione* 3,9 (72,24–25 V.).

117 Babai, *Tractatus Vaticanus* (300,15.31 V.).

118 Babai, *Tractatus Vaticanus* (301,7 V.).

119 Cf. Babai, *Tractatus Vaticanus* (291,1–307,16 V.); Abramowski, “Christologische Probleme” (see note 31), 309–314, 332; eadem, “Die Christologie Babais des Großen” (see note 19), 244; Chediath, *The Christology of Mar Babai* (see note 2), 87–89.

composite *qnoma* in Christ might have been that such *qnome* were considered unstable and temporary.¹²⁰ The view that God and the spiritual realm could be composite had also been rejected by others within the Church of the East.¹²¹

Babai further argued that Christ has two *qnome*, because each nature needs a *qnoma* in order to really exist and because this *qnoma* is the individual instance of a nature. From the Trinity, only the *qnoma* Word was involved in the union and similarly, from mankind only Jesus Christ. The union of these two individual natures implied therefore two *qnome*. Otherwise the whole divine nature and the whole human nature would be united to this *parsopa*. In a summary of his Christology Babai explained this necessity to recognize the individual instances (*qnome*) of each general nature (*kyana*) and emphasized the tight interrelationship between *qnoma*, *kyana*, *qnoma* and *parsopa* thus:

Every nature is known and revealed in the *qnome* that are beneath it, and every *qnoma* is a demonstrator and upholder of the nature from which it is. And every *parsopa* in the *qnoma* is fixed (محدد) and made distinct [as to what] it is. And no nature can be known without a *qnoma* and no *qnoma* can stand without a nature, and no *parsopa* can be distinguished without the *qnoma*. Take the *qnoma* and show us the *parsopa*! Take away the nature and show us the *qnoma*!

¹²⁰ Luise Abramowski suggests that Babai was especially influenced by Proclus' assumption that a composite *qnoma* would end in dissolution and loss of existence of its parts. She further suggests that ܩܢܡܐ ܕܥܡܕܐ was an attempt to translate Proclus' term ἀνθυποστατόν, although she acknowledges that Proclus applied it only with respect to simple *hypostases*. But as Proclus held also that the intellectual soul is an ἀνθυποστατόν, which somehow can be tied up with bodies, this suggestion does not seem improbable. Cf. Abramowski, "Christologische Probleme" (see note 31), 307–314; eadem, "Die Christologie Babais des Großen" (see note 19), 244; Marije Martin, *Proclus on Nature: Philosophy of Nature and Its Methods in Proclus' Commentary on Plato's 'Timaeus'* (Philosophia antiqua 121; Leiden, 2008), 26.

¹²¹ Becker points out that already Narsai († 503) had emphasized the simplicity of God, calling him "The one without composition" (*d-la rukka*): Becker, *Sources* (see note 21), 101–102. We have seen that the *Ecclesiastical History* also rejected the one composite *qnoma*. The *qnoma* of a soul is marked by subtlety (ܩܢܡܐ ܕܥܡܕܐ) and simplicity (ܩܢܡܐ ܕܥܡܕܐ), terms which are generally used to refer to the attributes of the immaterial (and therefore without parts) spiritual realm. Cf. Barhadbeshabba, *Historia ecclesiastica* 31 (PO 9, 593,3–4 N.; trans. Becker, *Sources* [see note 21], 51); Barhadbeshabba, *Causa scholas condendi* (334,4 S.; trans. 101 B.). Michael Malpana, who was also among those who left the School out of protest against Henana, stated that the Father "is not incarnate and not composite" (ܩܢܡܐ ܕܥܡܕܐ ܕܥܡܕܐ) (Michael Malpana, *Contra Jacobitas* [ed. Luise Abramowski and Alan E. Goodman, *A Nestorian Collection of Christological Texts* (see note 7), vol. 1, 109,17–19; trans. *ibid.*, vol. 2, 63,31–33]), and that therefore the *qnoma* of the Son is not composite either.

This adorable, marvellous, ineffable union has therefore all these ways and is above all these in a different way: . . . voluntary and according to the *parsopa* towards the one adorable *mdabbranuta* (guidance) in one conjunction and indwelling and union of the assuming with the assumed. And the conjunction (is) without confusion and the indwelling (is) infinite. For unitedly God dwells infinitely in his finite humanity, like the sun in a shining pearl, in one union.¹³⁷

3 The qnoma, the soul and their metaphors.

134 See also note 14.

135 Cf. Babai, *Liber de unione* 2,7 (57,7–16 V.).

136 Babai, *Liber de unione* 6,21 (227,13–16 V.).

137 Babai, *Liber de unione* 6,21 (230,13–23 V

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Babai used the example of an iron mirror (the purified soul) and a magnetic stone to explain at the same time how the soul can be lifted up by the life-giving stone to a height above sensory perception, and to warn that this does not imply the heresy of making the soul a part of the divinity, because stone and iron have different natures.¹⁴⁹ The example of the mirror figured also in the *Liber de Unione* to explain that two natures still can have one *parsopa*. The mirror can “absorb” (ܡܥܬܝܠ ܠܐܚܬܝܠ) the whole “appearance” (ܡܥܬܝܠܐ) of the sun “unitedly” (ܕܡܥܬܝܠܐ)¹⁵⁰ and temporarily acquires its properties: it becomes hot and can ignite fire. It does not, however, receive the nature of the sun, which does not change and remains one, even if reflected in many mirrors.¹⁵¹ In the *Tractatus Vaticanus* 178, the metaphor of the mirror illustrated that an individual face can be noticed in two *qnome*. When looked at in a mirror, the one face (*parsopa*) is stable in the viewer’s *qnoma*, while the other is assumed in the *qnoma* of the mirror.¹⁵²

152 Cf. Babai, *Tractatus Vaticanus* (303,26–304,2 V.).

Although he is a son from the womb in a unity with God the Word in one sonship, he learnt obedience through the sufferings he endured and was thus perfected (ἵκεν ἁγέρ). That is to say, he learnt in which (state) he was because of obedience. For he did not know immortality and unchangeableness, how they are, until he received them in his human *qnoma* by labour. And similarly he did not know the sufferings until he was tried by them, because they were not natural and fixed; but through trial he received them in his *qnoma*. . . . And true is indeed everything written about him that he endured in his human *qnoma*.¹⁵⁹

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one might also suggest that the metaphors reflected several developments within asceticism which resulted in an intrinsic motive to acknowledge two *qnoma* in Christ. First, the individual self, the free individual soul and *qnoma* were associated tightly with each other. Second, the ascetics were eager to purify their soul so that its substance (its *qnoma*) could become like a clear mirror in which they could see a reflection of the light of God. Third, Christ was their ultimate example and had all the human characteristics except for sin. Fourth, when the ascetics consequently ascribed such a purification to Christ as well, it might finally have become necessary to identify a human *qnoma* in Christ in addition to his divine *qnoma*. Moreover, as the sun was a metaphor for God, while the Son was compared to a ray that enlightens the mind and empowers and shines in the *qnoma* that received it, he might have been considered the mirror in which he could reflect the light of Divinity, like the sunlight dwelling in a pearl, and this light might also have been reflected by the saints.¹⁶⁰ A closer examination of the remaining parts of the unedited commentary on the two sermons of Mark the Monk, which probably was written by Babai, may corroborate this thesis.¹⁶¹

Babai was no exception in associating the soul and the purified *qnoma* in which the Divine could be seen, sometimes also combined with the metaphors of mirrors or coins. That association appeared, for instance, in the work of Sergius of Resh'ayna and in the contemporary *Ecclesiastical History and Cause*. In the work of Babai's successors, a few indications of the mystical connotations of the concept of *qnoma* also can be found and may have found their expression in a so-called mirror christology.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Babai, *Expositio libri Centuarium*, introduction; 4,24 (18; 36; 42; 278 F.).

¹⁶¹ This commentary is preserved in British Library Add. 17270. Paul Krüger holds that Mark had strongly influenced the asceticism and mysticism of Babai, who had presented Mark's words as his own opinion. See for a description of this text Krüger, "Zum theologischen Menschenbild" (see note 95), 46–48, 74; idem, "Cognitio sapientiae: Die Erkenntnis der Wahrheit nach den unveröffentlichten beiden Sermones Babais des Großen über das geistige Gesetz des Mönches Markus," in *Liturgica, monastica et ascetica, philosophica: ... held at Christ Church, Oxford, 1959* (ed. F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone; Studia patristica 5; TU 80; Leuven, 1962): 377–381. Cf. Lucas van Rompay's report on the discovery of eight additional folios in Deir al-Surian: Lucas van Rompay, "From Waste to Wealth," *Newsletter of Levantine Foundation* 3 (2009): 3, 7.

¹⁶² A further elaboration is beyond the scope of this article. Treiger finds elements from this mirror-Christology in the Islamic mysticism of al-Ghazali and suggests that the roots can be traced back to John of Dalyatha. As we have seen, this may at least be traced back to Babai. Alexander Treiger, "Al-Ghazālī's 'Mirror Christology' and Its Possible East-Syriac Sources," *The Muslim World* 101 (2011): (698–713) 699, 709–712.

4 Conclusion

Babai defended the “two-natures-two-*qnome* in one *parsopa*” formula in many ways. He not only guarded this newly defined orthodoxy in his own highly influential monastery and those affiliated with it, but he explained also extensively why two *qnome* are needed and not one. Babai was a fervent polemicist who opposed principally the range of heresies he saw stemming from Cyril and Origen and their teaching of the one-*qnoma* doctrine, which threatened to undermine many Antiochene principles. Babai accused Miaphysites, Justinian, Henana, and the circles affiliated to Henana of being their followers. The vigour of Babai’s defense of this two-*qnome* formula seems to have been driven by several factors.

The acknowledgment of two *qnome* in Christ was not really new, although it officially appeared for the first time in the records of the Synods of the East Syrian Church in 612 under the influence of Babai. Briefly after 431, Nestorius had already recognized two *qnome* in his apologetic *Liber Heraclidis* which was not available in Persia until 540. After the decisions of the Byzantine council of 553, which anathematized anyone not acknowledging one single composite *hypostasis* (*qnoma*) and identified *hypostasis* with *prosopon* (*parsopa*), the discussions within the famous theological School of Nisibis on the right integration of the concept *qnoma* to their Antiochene formula “two natures in one *parsopa*” seem to have led to conflicting solutions and formula.

Babai accused Henana, the director of the School, of teaching the one-*qnoma* solution. It is not clear, however, whether Henana really opted for the Neo-Chalcedonian one composite *qnoma* or even had Miaphysite sympathies, or whether he just defended the old Antiochene formula. He might have been in line with a Syriac version of the Neo-Chalcedonian terminology that identified *qnoma* and *parsopa* and this might have made him suspect. Those who did not accept the one-*qnoma* solution but opted for a two-*qnome* Christology left the School. They probably did so because they associated *qnoma* closely with nature and concluded therefore that one *qnoma* implied a one-nature Christology instead of the Antiochene two-nature formula. Many of them were connected to the Great Monastery, which was supported by the higher clergy in their efforts to bring diverse dissident monastic circles under their control. To this monastery belonged a school of some renown, and this was strengthened by the teachers who had left Henana’s school. Babai seems to have represented the Nestorian stream of the School of Nisibis in acknowledging two *qnome*.

The geo-political situation of Nisibis at the contested border of the Byzantine and Persian Empire at times of war gave rise to many additional tensions, as diverse and sometimes opposite loyalties to secular leaders ranging from local officials to the emperors were implied. The threat from Miaphysites was tangible

when they were awarded confiscated churches, monasteries and lands. Local authorities, mostly lay aristocrats, who could have invested their family capital in these properties, were affected and might have allied with one or the other denomination, probably depending on both theological and opportunistic considerations. The suggested specific alliance between aristocrats and the circles around Henana seems therefore to belong to a wider, general pattern and therefore not to have influenced Babai's defence of the two-*qnoma* formula profoundly. It is further not always clear to what extent such a distinct Christology was instrumental in finding favour with secular leaders.

Like Henana, Babai was influenced by Evagrian mysticism. Babai modified it into a system acceptable to the Church of the East. He eliminated Origenist elements from Evagrius' work and transformed it to a system that bound the monks to obedience to the hierarchy while guarding the Antiochene distinction between God's transcendence and human passibility against the notion of God and man becoming one. Babai elevated John of Apamea and this domesticated Evagrius to a similar position to that of Theodore of Mopsuestia, recommending both to monks in their efforts to gain access to the most advanced knowledge, that of God. In his mysticism, Babai may also have been influenced by Mark the Monk.

Epistemology, furthermore, played an important role, as the School of Nisibis and the monastery probably had rival claims on supremacy depending on who would offer the best way to the highest spiritual knowledge. These two groupings might moreover have differed in the extent to which this was thought possible. Although Henana remained in the Antiochene tradition of Divine *paideia*, Babai seems to have emphasized more that the mode of God's essence cannot be known. To him, this insight even formed the culmination of spiritual knowledge, for which baptism and the ascetic life were a prerequisite. It has been suggested that Babai rejected Henana's Origenist epistemology, because Henana might have used it to claim the best way to the highest knowledge to be not only by reason, the focus of schools, but also by inspiration. This would increase the prestige of the School and decrease that of the monastery. If this assumption is right, the difference in epistemology might have been a threat to Babai and might therefore have intensified his accusations against Henana for teaching Origenism and the doctrine of one *qnoma*. According to Babai, both Origenism and the one-*qnoma* Christology went along with the acceptance of only one nature in Christ, which would imply the teaching of the participation of the human nature in the divine nature. This in turn could be used to advocate the theory that the human intellect enabled humans to know the unknowable God and even to become God, which was abhorred. Here again, it is not clear to what extent Babai's accusations really applied to Henana. Maybe it was only a difference in terminology that gave rise to suspicions of the teaching of a one-*qnoma* Christology. Moreover, the connection

made by Babai between the teaching of one (composite) *qnoma* and Origenism must not necessarily have been Henana's, and the accusation of Origenism might principally have been aimed at incriminating Henana.

All the reasons given may have played a role. However, this paper has drawn attention to an aspect neglected thus far, which becomes clearer when the word *qnoma* is presented consistently as *qnoma*, rather than being rendered with a variety of expressions or even ignored as has often happened in translations and secondary literature. The new perspective focuses on the asceticism of the monks, which was aimed at finding the highest truth and required the purification of the individual soul. Sometimes, the soul was associated closely not only with the human *qnoma*, but also compared to a mirror that might reflect the light of Christ, just as Christ was considered to be the perfect representation of God. This might have resulted in an intrinsic motive of the monks to recognize also an individual human *qnoma* in Christ and might therefore have been an additional motive for their spiritual leader Babai to defend the two-*qnome* doctrine. It was moreover strengthened by Babai's soteriology: the obedience of Christ, according to his free will, which was in his human *qnoma*, was thought to play a crucial role in the salvation of man. Babai stated in this respect that even the human *qnoma* of Christ had to be tried and to learn obedience in order to be perfected.

My survey thus far indicates that Babai often used *qnoma* in the sense of individual nature, which was closely associated with the soul and the way it receives knowledge from impressions in its substance (*qnoma*). As this *qnoma* was moreover compared to an imagery already used by Ephrem, namely a mirror that could reflect the highest knowledge to the ascetic, the addition of two *qnome* must therefore also be seen in the close relation between Babai's Christology and epistemology, which required the purification of the individual soul or *qnoma*. This purification was probably only considered possible in the ascetic life of monks who had Christ as their prototype. Christ's human obedience and the purity of his soul, which—like a clear mirror—made him a perfect image of God, served as an example through which to enjoy a blissful, but momentary, vision of God. In line with the Antiochene tradition, Babai taught that although the divine nature is invisible, it is visible in the union of the two natures, namely in their one *parsopa*. Babai explained that the invisible is seen like the sun in a mirror or a pearl. After baptism, the *qnoma* of the soul could become a mirror and should use its own free will to direct it at the light of truth by discerning between good and bad, so that it finally might reflect the Trinity for a moment during prayer.

The way Babai linked the highest knowledge with the individual soul and *qnoma* might therefore have fostered his defence of the doctrine of two *qnome*. Meanwhile, Babai also might have tried to make this doctrine more applicable for the monks of his monastery by connecting it further to its ascetic-mystical

tradition. As aspects of Babai's epistemology seem to have existed before his time, Babai's two-*qnome* doctrine might even have been the expression of an already existent undercurrent within reform monasticism, which was to last at least during the next decades. A further rereading of relevant Syriac passages, such as those of Mark the Monk and John of Apamea and of the later East Syrian mystical works might corroborate this hypothesis.

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